

DO WE WANT RIFLE PRACTICE
IN THE PUBLIC SCHOOLS?

Answers by President Eliot,
Professor John Dewey, Andrew
Carnegie, Jane Addams, Ed-
ward Everett Hale, and Others.

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DO WE WANT RIFLE PRACTICE IN THE PUBLIC SCHOOLS?

THE proposal to introduce rifle practice into our public schools has been made recently with such seriousness and from such high quarters as to demand attention from all interested in the progress and welfare of our schools.

The following pages contain the opinions of some of the most prominent educators and leaders of thought in the United States in regard to this proposal. These opinions are mostly from replies to a recent letter asking for an expression on the subject.

The advocates of systematic rifle practice for boys as part of the public school curriculum urge that a nation of trained marksmen is a valuable preparation for war. They assume that training a nation for the practice of war is of greater importance than training a nation for the practice of peace, thus seeming to ignore the broader pedagogical and practical aspects of the question.

The views of the eminent men and women who have contributed to this pamphlet are presented for the deliberate consideration of those to whom the management of our schools is entrusted.

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GOVERNOR CHARLES E. HUGHES

From a Speech delivered in New York City, 1907.

“ We can no longer look to war for the development of either national or individual character. The heroics of war have been replaced by mathematical calculations. If it was ever anything else, it is now unmitigated horror, exhibiting chiefly fiendish aspects of ingenuity and scientific skill in destruction. Under our modern conditions of civilization the supposed beneficent results of war in the development of courage and stamina must in any conceivable event be shared by so few of our teeming populations that even the most sanguinary must realize that the time has gone by, when, by any stretch of imagination it can be regarded as a general disciplinary agent. And in the controversies of peace and in the bloodless struggles for the maintenance of truth and justice in our personal and civic relations must be found the arena of the future in which character may find severer tests than ever were afforded by historic battlefield.”

**CHARLES W. ELIOT,
President of Harvard University.**

“Rifle practice seems to me unsuitable for school exercise, because the pupils are not old enough for it, even if it were a desirable form of bodily training. Military drill, quite apart from rifle practice, seems to me one of the poorest forms of bodily exercise, very inferior to most gymnasium exercises, and to all free sports. There is too much routine and automatic action in it, and too much repression of individual freedom. The only good part of it is the setting-up drill, which can easily be made a gymnastic exercise without military accompaniments. Rifle practice is in my judgment, only fit for an elective exercise at the college or technical school age. At that time it interests profitably some young men who feel the hunting instinct or who mean to serve in the militia. Even then it is a difficult exercise to maintain, because it requires the use of an expensive and perhaps distant range.

“You will observe that I am opposed to rifle practice because it seems to me, on general pedagogic principles, unsuitable and untimely in the public schools.”

**HENRY CHURCHILL KING,
President of Oberlin College.**

“I should be sorry to see rifle practice introduced into the public schools of the country. I think the evils would largely outweigh the advantages.”

**DAVID STARR JORDAN,
President of Leland Stanford Junior University.**

“I do not think that accurate shooting necessarily makes for militarism. I do not, however, believe in the introduction of rifle practice in the public school curriculum.”

**ISAAC SHARPLESS,
President of Haverford College.**

“I should deplore the introduction of rifle practice or any other practice which would tend to develop a military spirit in the public schools of the country. The tendencies of the age are toward industrial and international peace, and any block in this progress is a serious menace to the ultimate prosperity and standards of the country.

“I was somewhat surprised and quite delighted to find, in a recent visit at Cambridge University, England, that these sentiments were largely shared by educated Englishmen and that the tendency to discourage rifle practice was quite marked.”

**PROFESSOR SAMUEL T. DUTTON,
Teachers College, Columbia University.**

“I am decidedly opposed to introducing rifle practice into city public or private schools. I believe there are other forms of physical and mental training which are better for young people and that the use of a rifle under any circumstances by children should be a matter to be controlled by parents only.

“There are several objections to the introduction of rifle practice into schools. One is that the use of dangerous weapons in any kind of sport does not need to be stimulated. It is attended with a certain element of danger and in many ways needs to be restrained rather than encouraged. Secondly, to introduce this form of activity implies that as a nation, we are likely to go to war. No sane person believes that under present conditions there is any need of war. A sufficient army and navy for police duty can be provided, and this, supplemented by the state militia, is enough.”

**PROFESSOR JOHN DEWEY,
Columbia University.**

“It would be a long step backward in the traditions of the American people and of American education to introduce rifle practice into our public schools. Aside from the general objections from the standpoint of civilization, humanity and moral progress, which ought to be absolutely final, the objections from the standpoint of school administration and discipline are most serious. It would introduce another distracting factor where high-school boys are already over distracted and stimulated, and would increase the evil force of the exciting and distracting conditions that already, especially in our cities, are more than powerful enough. It is undemocratic, barbaric, and scholastically wholly unwise.”

**PROFESSOR CHARLES ZUEBLIN,
University of Chicago.**

“Rifle practice in the public schools would be peculiarly abhorrent to me. I hope our schools may instil ideals of peace. As disarmament seems at present utopian, I think the Swiss military system, demanding one year of each able-bodied man, might be utilized to develop skill of marksmanship of mature men, whose main activities would be useful work for the government. But athletics and manual training are infinitely preferable in the schools.”

**JANE ADDAMS,
Hull-House, Chicago.**

“I am of course shocked at any proposition to introduce rifle practice into the public schools.

“The increasing number of accidents and murders due to the totally unnecessary and illegal ‘carrying of concealed weapons,’ makes it difficult to understand why familiarity with fire arms should be encouraged. If war is to continue, at least let us insist that the use of fire arms shall be confined to the soldier, as strictly as the surgeon’s knife is limited to the man professionally prepared to use it.”

**CAROLINE HAZARD,
President of Wellesley College.**

“I shall be very sorry to have rifle practice, or anything which involves the use of arms, introduced into our public schools. The modern custom of having toy pistols as playthings for young boys, seems to me a most injurious one, and if it should be carried farther, and practice in fire arms included as part of the school education, it seems to me a decided step would be taken in the wrong direction.

“We are better situated than any country in the world almost, to maintain peace with our neighbors, and the thought of war and strife should not be made a familiar one to our young people.”

**MARY E. WOOLLEY,
President of Mount Holyoke College.**

“You are quite right in thinking that I believe that the introduction of rifle practice into our school system would be a backward step, and a real menace to the progress of the peace movement. I cannot see that there is anything to be said in favor of its introduction, while I feel that the strongest arguments may be urged against it.

“It seems to me, first, a waste of money, when the schools of the country are often handicapped by the lack of suitable

buildings, sufficient equipment, and adequate salaries for the teachers. Secondly, I believe that it is a waste of time. There is constant complaint that students are overcrowded with work and have not time for recreation and physical exercise. Rifle practice certainly would not give the best sort of physical exercise, or the kind of recreation which is desirable. Its influence in promoting a spirit of warfare, rather than of peace, goes without saying."

LUCIA AMES MEAD,
Boston.

"So far as I know, no nation has yet used its people's taxes to teach school boys the art of killing. The training has no pedagogic value. It would cost money, sorely needed to teach the use of the tools of industry, to prepare for the perennial fight against pauperism, disease and crime.

"Rifle shooting in the schools would be an unprecedented measure, implying some new national danger to justify it. No such danger exists except in the minds of yellow journalists and some military men. For 119 years we have had only five years of war with foreign powers, and were invaded only in 1812. We no longer fear England, for we leave our northern frontier unguarded. We have no quarrel with any nation and our real enemies are those within our midst. Teach the power of organized ostracism as a substitute for guns; a nation that feeds Europe ninety days a year can always bring a force to bear far greater than a navy. Neutralize our Philippines, and we shall need no more guns to defend our western shores; establish peace budgets, and with the wise expenditure of one dollar for conciliation for every thousand spent on war, we can substitute methods for winning friends for methods of killing supposititious enemies."

NATHAN C. SCHAEFFER
Superintendent of Public Instruction in Pennsylvania.

*Extract from his Inaugural Address as President of the National Educational Association,
Los Angeles, 1907.*

“Peace has become so great a shibboleth that the introduction of rifle practice into the public schools is now advocated as a peace measure. The experience of our recent wars, it is held, has pointed out that, while there is no difficulty in case of war in getting all the volunteers that the country requires, and they can be given a reasonable amount of drill in a few weeks, it takes them a long time to learn to shoot, and that unless they can shoot accurately they are of little value as soldiers. If, however, the young men who are graduating from our high schools in the different States should be skilled riflemen, the country can rest content with a small standing army, knowing that in case of war it can put into the field at short notice a force of volunteers whose skill in rifle shooting will make them to be fully the equal of any army which may be brought against them. The system is therefore a great factor for national peace. As a teacher from the State which William Penn founded, I must put a big interrogation point after this theory. The fact that boys at the age of thirteen can learn to shoot with marvelous accuracy should be correlated with the fact that at the same age, and even earlier, boys can be taught all sorts of break-neck acrobatics; no one would, on account of the skill which may thus be acquired, be justified in advocating the introduction of either acrobatics or rifle practice into the curriculum of our public schools. There is a limitation to the kinds of skill which a human being may acquire, and the development of skill in these directions inter-

fers seriously with the development of skill in other and more useful lines. The development of skill in shooting is desirable on the part of those who join the army or the State constabulary; but if during a strike every striker were a skilled rifleman, the difficulties in maintaining order would be infinitely multiplied."

**From MRS. HARRY HASTINGS,
New York City.**

"The brutalizing effect of this rifle practice, if it becomes general, is only a question of time; its antagonism to the Peace Cause is indisputable."

**EDMUND A. JONES,
State Commissioner of Common Schools, Columbus, Ohio.**

"I have just returned from the Peace Conference in New York, and you may naturally infer that I am not much in favor of military instruction in our public schools. I can readily see that some advantages may result to our boys in an erect and manly bearing from a military drill in marching, etc., but I do not believe it is advisable to place rifles in the hands of boys of thirteen years and over in our public schools. I served in the civil war and was wounded in the defense of my country at that time, but I believe we have reached a time in our civilization when international difficulties can be settled by arbitration without the horrors and sacrifices of war."

**MASON S. STONE,
Superintendent of Public Instruction in Vermont.**

"I wish to state that we advise peace rather than war, and while we are in favor of physical training, nevertheless we are not enthusiastic over military drill in the public schools."

**FRANCIS G. BLAIR,
Superintendent of Public Instruction in Illinois.**

"I hope sincerely that no such thing is contemplated." (He refers to arrangement for target shooting in the public schools by the national government.)

**GEO. H. MARTIN,
State Board of Education, Boston, Mass.**

"I am entirely opposed to any further development of the military spirit among school boys."

**J. H. FUQUA, Sr.,
Superintendent of Public Instruction in Kentucky.**

"I don't think our authorities would favor such a move,(i. e. the introduction of rifle practice), as we desire to teach the principles of peace, and not encourage in the youth a sentiment for war,"

ANDREW CARNEGIE,
New York City.

“The introduction of rifle practice into the public schools would be a step backward. What ought to be taught is that war is savagery, unworthy of civilized man.”

JOHN H. CONVERSE,
Philadelphia.

“Believing, as I do, that the education of children as supported by public taxation, should be confined as far as possible to essentials, I am not in favor of any special features such as instruction in rifle practice in our public schools.” .

EDWARD EVERETT HALE.
Washington, D. C.

“I am quite sure that the public schools fail in their duty unless the boys and girls are trained in respect to their superiors, in obedience to those in authority, in courtesy in address, in kindness to all. The New Testament sums up such training when it says ‘The wisdom from above is first pure.’

Personal Purity is the foundation.

2. Next. This ‘wisdom is peaceable.’

Rifle practice is certainly not peaceable.

3. This ‘wisdom is gentle.’

“If you care for what the Apostle said, he meant, that the gentleman is one who abstains somewhat from demanding all his rights.

“The gentleman is more glad to give than to receive.”

JOHN W. FOSTER,
Former Secretary of State, Washington, D. C.

“I should regard any recommendation for the introduction of rifle practice into the public schools of the country as an unjustifiable and wicked act, whether issued by the War Department or any other authority.

“The natural tendency of the youth of our country to military exercises is great enough already, and it is cruel to stimulate in them the art of killing their fellow-men.”

CHARLES E. JEFFERSON,
Minister of Broadway Tabernacle, New York.

“‘To keep the peace we must prepare for war.’ Some one said that long ago, and men have repeated it as tho it were a word from the mouth of God. Its hollowness is evident to any one who will look into it. The fact is that to keep the peace we must prepare for peace. If you want war, then prepare for war, multiply your guns, burnish them and make them shine, practice with them, keep the air filled with the reverberations of the roar of cannon. Swing your fleet from one ocean to another just when hearts are most irritated. Fill your newspapers with accounts of what your ships are doing, crowd your magazines with pictures of torpedo boats and destroyers. Set all the young men of the country thinking and talking about war, and then some day war will come. It is inevitable! If a nation does not want to fight it must put up its sword. It is amazing that there is an intelligent man on the earth who cannot see this.”



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